ROCKY CREEK BRIDGE
Texas Historic Bridges Recording Project
Spanning Boggy Creek at Hilltop Road
(moved from Rocky Creek at St. Ludmilla Street
[County Route 286], Shiner Vicinity)
Shiner
Lavaca County
Texas

HAER NO. TX-44

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
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Washington, DC 20240

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ROCKY CREEK BRIDGE

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Location:	Spanning Boggy Creek at Hilltop Road, Shiner, Lavaca County, Texas. (Moved from Rocky Creek at St. Ludmilla Street [County Route 286], Shiner vicinity, Lavaca County, Texas.) UTM: 14/678280/3255160 USGS: Shiner, Texas, quadrangle (1987).
Date of Construction:	1919.
Designer:	Unknown.
Builder:	A. D. McClaim and Company.
Present Owner:	Lavaca County.
Present Use:	Pedestrian bridge.
Significance:	Originally built to serve local traffic on the outskirts of Shiner, Texas, this 100'-0"-long riveted Pratt through truss bridge has been relocated to the edge of the business district and now connects the city with the renowned Spoetzl Brewery. The bridge is an early Texas example of a Pratt through truss with riveted connections.
Historian:	J. Philip Gruen, August 1996. Revised September 1998.
Project Information:	This document was prepared as part of the Texas Historic Bridges Recording Project performed during the summer of 1996 by the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER). The project was co-sponsored by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).

On August 21, 1995, hundreds of Shiner city residents lined the streets to watch an old steel bridge move a mile and a half from the outskirts of town to the edge of the business district. A bridge moving slowly through the streets of any town is likely to be noticed, but because this bridge nearly met the wrecker's ball, this was a major local event. The 100'-0"-long riveted Pratt through truss was moved to a crossing over Boggy Creek, adjacent to the famous Spoetzl Brewery (producers of Shiner brand beers) to serve as a pedestrian-only bridge connecting downtown Shiner with the Spoetzl Brewery. The bridge re-opened as a pedestrian-only bridge at a dedication ceremony sponsored by the brewery on December 5, 1997. Now spanning its previous location on County Route 286 is a Texas State Highway Department-approved three-span, prestressed concrete I-beam bridge with a 28'-0"-wide roadway.

The community mobilization, civic support, and state funding that relocated and restored this bridge represents a local appreciation and understanding of history, just as it indicates that the preservation of historic structures can contribute to a local economy. The decision to move this bridge in the immediate vicinity of the Spoetzl Brewery — one of Shiner's oldest continuous businesses, largest employers, greatest revenue generators, and its biggest tourist attraction — transformed what nearly became scrap metal into a centerpiece for the city. The bridge, however, is significant for reasons extending beyond its current location and the recent community efforts to preserve it. When erected in 1919, it was among the earliest Texas examples of a Pratt through truss bridge with riveted connections.

Like most nineteenth-century Texas rural towns, the arrival of the railroad to Shiner was crucial for its development. The area was first settled by Henry B. Shiner who, after making a fortune in the cattle business, acquired 8,000 acres of land in the western portion of Lavaca County in the early 1880s. Shiner's acreage attracted a few immigrants, mostly of German and Czech descent, but prior to the arrival of the railroad only a few scattered developments existed in the area. The only development with the marks of a potential town site was a post office which served as a trading center known as "Half Moon." But when the San Antonio and Arkansas Pass Railroad laid tracks through the county in 1887, it bypassed Half Moon in favor of another parcel of land donated by Shiner for a depot and a right-of-way.[1]

Many immigrant farmers settled in the vicinity of the railroad station, and the new town, initially called "New Half Moon," grew quickly. In 1888, the town was renamed "Shiner," and by 1890 it had grown large enough to become incorporated. In later years, Henry B. Shiner recounted the town's early history:

> When I came here there were none at all to amount to anything. The old settlers were scattered here and there over the country. . . . The Germans and Bohemians who have settled up this country have made it blossom as the rose.[2]

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[1] Paul C. Boethel, *Sand in Your Craw* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1959), pp. 25-26.

[2] Henry B. Shiner, *Shiner Gazette,* cited in Boethel, *Sand in Your Craw,* p. 26.

Despite a couple of fires, Shiner continued to grow in the 1890s, due principally to the strength of its cotton and cattle industries.[3] The town, along with the rest of Lavaca County, struggled financially from 1900 to 1930 due to cheaper beef prices, more expensive land, and the subsequent decline in the cotton and cattle industries. But the city's economy stayed afloat because some residents developed a dairy industry and others began different businesses such as brewing beer.

In 1909, a group of Shiner entrepreneurs appealed to its settlers by forming the Shiner Brewing Association and building a brewery. After the first keg spoiled in 1914 (due to poor refrigeration), the founders put the brewery up for lease. It was purchased by Kosmos Spoetzl, a German immigrant brewer who renamed the plant "Home Brewery" and began producing beer in wooden kegs and bottles and, after 1916, in glass returnable bottles. Three years later, construction began on what would come to be known as the Rocky Creek Bridge approximately a mile and a half to the southeast. It would be seventy-seven years after the erection of this bridge that these two seemingly unrelated events would be linked.

County Route 286

In mid-May 1919, Lavaca County Commissioners transferred $6,000.00 from its "General Fund" to its "Road and Bridge Fund." On May 16, they opened the bidding for the erection of a steel bridge over Rocky Creek. Three companies submitted bids, and the county commissioners awarded the contract to A. D. McClaim and Company for its low bid of $1,223.00.[4]

The bridge is a 100'-0" long, 16'-3" wide, and 13'-0" tall Pratt through truss. The span is divided into six panels of 16'-8" each. As originally constructed, it included approach spans supported by six steel stringers, two on one end and four on the other, for a total bridge length of 220'-0". Bents of steel caps on steel caissons held up the truss, and other bents with steel caps and steel piling supported the approach spans.[5] Before its move, the bridge's deck was paved with concrete and asphalt.

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[3] Paul C. Boethel, *History of Lavaca County,* rev. ed. (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1959), p. 105.

[4] Other bids were offered by Midland Bridge Company ($1,230.00) and Austin Brothers Bridge Company (amount unavailable). See Lavaca County, Texas, *Commissioners' Court Minutes,* vol. M (Lavaca County Courthouse, Hallettsville, Texas), p. 185 (May 1919).

[5] While metal caisson supports were common for Pratt truss bridges in the late nineteenth century, they were virtually unheard of by 1900. For this reason, it may be that the 1919 bridge was placed on existing caissons from a previous bridge. However, nothing has yet been found to confirm this theory.

Many of the steel members, including the gusset plates, were connected with a combination of bolts and rivets. This use of riveting represents an early application of this method in relation to Texas Pratt through truss bridges. While methods of riveting and bolting had been practiced by railroad engineers as early as the 1880s, it was not until the 1920s that riveting replaced pin-connections for truss building in Texas.[6]

The bridge spanned Rocky Creek, the largest waterway in the Shiner vicinity, just south of the city limits on Saint Ludmilla Street (County Route 286). With the local cotton and lumber industries in that area busy by 1920, the bridge was probably built to facilitate the passage of crops and wood from farms and timberlands into the city and the railroad depot for what had become, by 1892, the Southern Pacific Railroad.[7] The bridge may have also served as a conduit for students and church-going citizens from the nearby farms heading to the Saint Ludmilla Academy and the Saint Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church just a few blocks to the north. From 1920 to 1921, a smaller church building was replaced by the current structure, which dominates the city's skyline.

Through much of the twentieth century, the bridge served the locals efficiently, providing a crossing for farm machinery, crops, school buses, and citizens. It may have also served southbound trucks delivering bottles of cold Shiner beer to area farmers and surrounding small towns.[8] Yet the construction of State Routes 90A and 95 through Shiner probably ended the bridge's purpose as a major conduit for beer-hauling vehicles.

Floods of 1936, 1940, and 1981 and an average daily traffic of over 400 vehicles contributed, however, to the bridge's structural decline.[9] By September of 1993, a preliminary

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[6] See Barbara Stocklin, "Statement of Historic Contexts: Historic Bridges of Texas, 1866-1945," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, p. 14, 1995, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

[7] A map of 1912 indexes three lumber companies and four cotton gin companies, and in 1922, three lumber companies and five cotton gins. See Sanborn Map Company, *Shiner, Texas* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1912, 1922). The Southern Pacific had abandoned the railroad line through Shiner by 1933.

[8] As part of his marketing plan, Kosmos Spoetzl drove through rural parts of Texas, offering farmers cold beer and selling his product with the help of a "hobo" band. His daughter, Cecile, continued this unusual marketing procedure when she took over after Kosmos' death in 1950, adding parades and radio advertisements. See "Spoetzl Brewery," in *The New Handbook of Texas,* ed. Ron Tyler, vol. 6, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), pp. 31-32.

[9] For the number of automobile crossings, see Paul Powell, "Historic Shiner Bridge May Move," *Victoria Advocate,* 14 January 1994, p. 1.

environmental assessment of bridge replacement noted rusting steel (particularly at the truss bearings), cracks in the concrete deck, and exposed reinforcing steel beneath the deck.[10]

Without enthusiastic support from the county commissioners, who considered the structure dangerous and more expensive to fix than to replace, the bridge's fate appeared certain.[11] But Jean Kaspar, a local preservationist and former commissioner of the Texas Historical Commission, worked to save the bridge. By mid-1994, she managed to encourage both the city of Shiner and the Spoetzl Brewery to fund a relocation, noting that a site near the brewery not only had potential as a tourist attraction, but would provide a safer method of crossing from downtown to the brewery.[12] The mayor of Shiner was enthusiastic about the possible relocation, and by mid-June of 1994, the city of Shiner and the Spoetzl Brewery had submitted a proposal to relocate the bridge.[13]

The Brewing of History

For the time being, beer-hauling vehicles — or any vehicles — will be prohibited from crossing the bridge. In its new location over Boggy Creek, a tributary of Rocky Creek that runs north and south through the eastern section of the city, the span will be open only to pedestrians. Nevertheless, the bridge will still get plenty of use; in fact, it is likely that more people will cross it on foot in the next few years than crossed in any fashion during the past seventy-six years.

Its specific location is over Boggy Creek linking the end of Sixth Street on the edge of downtown Shiner with Hilltop Road — essentially an entrance to the Spoetzl Brewery complex, which includes the brewery, a beer museum, and a gift shop. Up until August of 1981, a steel truss bridge with similar dimensions spanned the creek, but washed away during a disastrous

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[10] Texas Department of Transportation, "Preliminary Environmental Assessment for Proposed Bridge Replacement: County Road 286, Rocky Creek, Lavaca County," September 1993 (Texas Department of Transportation, Environmental Affairs Division, Austin, Texas).

[11] See description of Lavaca County Judge W. A. Hobbs' comments in Tim Delaney, "Moody Street Bridge Paves Way," *Victoria Advocate,* 8 November 1993, p. 12.

[12] Kaspar explained that many people often use the existing railroad trestle to access the brewery from downtown. See Steve Sadowsky, to Dianna F. Noble, Director of Environmental Affairs, Texas Department of Transportation, 7 January 1994 (Historic Bridge Inventory Files, Texas Department of Transportation, Environmental Affairs Division, Austin, Texas).

[13] Ibid.

flood. Despite its fifteen-year absence from this location, however, the old bridge has been reproduced on every label of bottled Shiner Bock beer.[14]

The abutments for the old bridge approaches remained after the flood, so they were re-used for the relocated Rocky Creek Bridge. While most of the bridge was moved intact, the truss now rests upon four new 36"-diameter cylindrical drilled shafts, and includes new approaches of 20'-0" on the city side and 40'-0" towards the brewery. The far end of the 40'-0" approach rests on an existing abutment, although one set of extra piers was added for support. The bridge also boasts a spiffy new forest-green paint job — matching that of a new brewery addition — and has been retrofitted with a new wooden deck. The Texas Department of Transportation paid for the removal and relocation of the bridge in addition to the construction of new approaches and the deck installation. The city and county agreed to maintain and preserve the bridge over the years. The area surrounding the bridge and Boggy Creek is slated to be developed into a city park and a petting zoo.

The bridge will now begin what seems to be an entirely new chapter; after years as a farm-to-market bridge tucked away outside of the city, it will serve primarily as a pedestrian crossing for brewery visitors in a convenient location on the edge of downtown Shiner. In many ways, however, this chapter simply takes a different twist: the bridge will continue to serve the local economy, just in a slightly different fashion.

The relocation and preservation of the Rocky Creek Bridge by the city and the brewery saved one of eighteen remaining steel truss bridges in Lavaca County from demolition.[15] As one of the earliest examples of a riveted Pratt through truss bridge in Texas, the Rocky Creek Bridge retains importance as part of Texas's engineering development. Its new location in the vicinity of one of the most famous breweries in Texas indicates a civic effort to keep its local history alive, and, in the process, some of Texas' engineering history as well.

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[14] The labels depict what resembles a Pratt through truss bridge in the right foreground, with three vertical compression members and no tension members. In the background is the current white, three-tiered brewery building, built in 1947. Two of its facades feature Alamo-styled roof lines.

[15] Four more county bridges are scheduled for replacement by 1997.

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APPENDIX A: Suggestions for Further Research

Some questions concerning the Rocky Creek Bridge arose during the research and writing of this report. Some of these questions, due to limitations in the scope of the Texas Historic Bridges Recording Project, remain unanswered. It is suggested that scholars interested in this bridge consider pursuing the following:

1. Who was A. D. McClaim, and what else did he build?

2. Who designed this bridge?

3. Was there a previous bridge at the Rocky Creek crossing?

APPENDIX B: Sketch Plan and Elevation